

Community Health Nursing

More than 306,406 rural residents are eligible for Nevada State Health Division's public health nursing services offered through the Bureau of Community Health's Community Health Nurse (CHN) Program. The CHN program has 17 clinic sites and 54 satellite locations throughout the 14 rural and frontier counties and recent emerged urban Carson County. The public health nurses in these communities are a trusted source of preventative health care and health information for all populations in the rural and frontier counties. Most CHN clinics have access to bi-lingual interpreters for minorities and undocumented aliens. However, these services are limited in isolated and rural communities. As one of the few safety net health resources serving minority, low income and indigent populations, the CHN staff of 30 public health nurses (combined workforce of state, county, and contractual) identify needs to provide services to fill the gaps in their communities.

A major workforce issue impacting the Community Health Nurse program is the nursing shortage. This shortage impacts the program's ability to meet Healthy People 2010 goal, as community health nurses (CHN) are the primary workforces delivering preventive health care services in rural Nevada. Besides providing core public health services, duties include patient education, patient health assessments, prevention of illness and diseases, advocacy, and identifying community needs. The Community Health Nurse program is currently short seven Advance Practitioner Nurse(s) (APNs).

The Nevada State Hospital Association reports the following two issues as affecting the nursing shortage; 1) Nevada's rapidly increasing population, and 2) that the work force is being diluted by women having greater opportunities to go into other fields. A report by the Department of Health and Human Services reported that Nevada has the worst nurse-to-patient ratio in the country, with 520 nurses per 100,000 people. In rural Nevada, 4.5 RN per 1,000 population, -17.29% drop within last two years. APN's account for 4.14% of the 4.5 RN per 1,000 population. The Community Health Nursing program lost 10 nurses within this past year due to retirements.

The nursing shortage has strained the Bureau of Community Health (BCH) to provide prevention and intervention community health nursing and family planning services to individuals and groups in rural and frontier Nevada. An internal assessment was conducted regarding staff assignments, coverage areas, and services provided. To ensure working poor and indigent population's had access to preventive health care the program refocused their efforts to a public health model based on population need. Consequently, a realignment of staff and community health nursing clinics in the rural communities were done.

Even though the Community Health Nursing program has been impacted by the nursing shortage, program staff continues to provide needed services and reports the following:

ISSUE:

Southern Nye County has several rural communities that are isolated from Las Vegas, the nearest metropolitan area. The Southern Nye Community Health Office is one of the few immunization providers of the Vaccine for Children's (VFC) program in rural Nevada. The growth rate in Pahrump alone has been approximately 5% to 8% annual for the past five years. The challenge for the CHN Program is to educate parents and immunize children in our quest to prevent vaccine preventable diseases.

INTERVENTION:

The Southern Nye County Community Health Office has partnered with the local Rotary Club for the past 15 to 20 years for various health issues, more so to provide immunizations for Southern Nye communities. Twice a year the CHN Office holds an immunization clinic with the Rotary Club members. The first clinic of the year is held every April during National Immunization Week. Coordination of these activities include the Nye County School District, in an attempt to meet the needs during kindergarten round up, as this is the time of year the School District starts the process.

The second immunization clinic is held every August just before school starts. This has been an important opportunity to assist the School District in updating student immunizations, as well as, catching those kindergarteners that were missed in April. The Nye County clinic also promotes adult immunizations during this time, as well. Educating the adult population on the importance of current tetanus vaccination has been an important part of this partnership.

These clinics are held on Saturdays each year in an attempt to assist those families that work the traditional 8a-5p work schedule, Monday through Friday.

IMPACT:

Each clinic has been able to provide immunization services to rural communities, capturing from 50 to 150 individuals, depending on the year. In 2004 alone, 50 clients were seen in April and 75 clients in August. The general community has verbalized appreciation with both the Rotary Club and CHN clinic efforts for the opportunity to bring children in on Saturday. A successful partnership with the Rotary Club in Southern Nevada, and each year this partnership grows stronger. With vaccine preventable immunizations comes a much healthier community.

ISSUE

February 2004 proved to be a very challenging time for the Community Health Nursing (CHN) program. With realignment of nursing staff throughout rural Nevada, traveling nurses were essential to meet coverage demands and maximize provider services during Nevada's critical nursing shortage. During this time, an "outbreak" of active TB cases erupted at Lake Tahoe. One Nevada Resident and two California residents were diagnosed with Tuberculosis disease. Two of the three were casino employees at popular local resorts.

INTERVENTION

In addition to providing case management and daily Direct Observed Therapy (DOT) to the one Nevada resident, the Zephyr Cove Clinic nurse participated in a mass screening effort of approximately 100 casino employees. The three case investigations were conducted through the joint efforts of the CHN program, Nevada State Epidemiological Staff, and Eldorado County Health Department. A total of 35 workers were found to have positive skin tests and after chest x-ray and symptom review ruled out active disease, preventative treatment was initiated.

The one Nevada resident was found to have drug resistance to the primary anti-TB drug, necessitating CDC expert consultation to develop an alternative treatment plan. This plan included daily Streptomycin injections. Local community resources were enlisted to provide medication administration coverage on the days that the local nurse was out of town.

IMPACT

Relationships were created and strengthened between Nevada State Health Division, Eldorado County California Health Department, Harrah's-Harvey's Casino, Stateline Medical Center professionals, and the Douglas County Health Officer. Approximately 50 clients were identified and who either had Tuberculosis, were contacts to those cases or who had previous exposure to TB in this epidemiological problem. All of the affected patient's were appropriately treated. The Human Resources Director of Harrah's complemented the professionalism demonstrated by the health care professionals who responded quickly and effectively to this challenge.